

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 5th September 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Policy and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document – Approval for a period of Public Consultation

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report seeks the approval of the Executive Board to publish the consultation draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for a six week period of public consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The consultation draft Affordable Housing SPD (Appendix A) is approved by Executive Board for the purposes of public consultation for a six week period.**
- (2) any minor drafting amendments to be made to the consultation draft Affordable Housing SPD prior to public consultation be agreed by the Operational Director: Policy, Planning and Transportation in consultation with the Executive Board Member, Physical Environment.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Purpose of the Affordable Housing SPD

- 3.1 The purpose of the Affordable Housing SPD is to provide greater certainty and clarity for all parties involved in the delivery of affordable housing in Halton through the planning system. It expands upon policy CS13: Affordable Housing in the adopted Halton Core Strategy (April 2013), providing guidance to prospective applicants. Specifically this SPD aims to:
- a) Maximise the opportunities available and ensure the smooth delivery of affordable housing to meet Halton's housing needs; and
 - b) Reduce uncertainty, ensure a consistent approach and provide clear guidance for all stakeholders to follow.

Background

- 3.2 Production of this Supplementary Planning Document began in 2011 in response to the emerging affordable housing policy in the Core Strategy. As Halton Borough Council have not previously had a policy requirement for the provision of affordable housing on private sites, it was felt beneficial to produce additional guidance for developers to assist the process. The production of formal guidance through a Supplementary Planning Document, to support the Core Strategy policy was felt to be the best way of achieving this.
- 3.3 Following drafting of the document, the Affordable Housing SPD was brought before the Executive Board on 24th May 2012 when approval was granted to undertake a period of public consultation on the content of the SPD. This public consultation was carried out alongside the consultation on the Core Strategy Post Submission Changes for eight weeks between 20th July and 14th September 2012.
- 3.4 No comments were received during the 8 week public consultation held on the draft Affordable Housing SPD. No comments were received on the higher policy in the Core Strategy (CS13) either.
- 3.5 Since the 2012 public consultation, necessary changes have been identified to remove potential ambiguity regarding the treatment of developments by or involving Registered Providers in the 'Thresholds' section of the SPD. This is due to the fact that Registered Providers are able to develop private rented housing. In such cases where Registered Provider schemes comprise of, or include 10 or more non-affordable units, the Core Strategy affordable housing requirements will apply. These changes, whilst affecting a minority of potential applications are material and as such, it is necessary to undertake proper public consultation on them.
- 3.6 In addition, the version of the SPD consulted on previously, included a 'model Section 106 legal agreement'. As we have sought to apply this to the first of our affordable housing negotiations it has become evident that the 'model' legal agreement will need to be refined through practical experience and including a draft in the SPD would quickly become out of date, necessitating a premature review of the SPD. To avoid this situation arising, the model agreement has been omitted from the SPD and we will instead make up-to-date copies available to applicants and on our website.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The SPD is intended to supplement policy CS13 of the Halton Core Strategy Local Plan, which was formally adopted by Full Council in April 2013. Once adopted, this SPD will form part of Halton's folder of planning policy documents. The content of the SPD will thus be a material consideration for the determination of all applicable residential development applications (those delivering 10 or more dwellings) and

as such, provide the Council with greater detail and certainty when seeking to manage and guide the provision of affordable housing across the Borough.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introducing an affordable housing requirement for the Borough through the Core Strategy will place a burden on Planning Officers who will need to highlight the new policy to applicants and ensure compliance with the policy prior to the validation of any applicable planning application.

5.2 In addition to the resource implications for Planning Officers, officers in Property Services will be required to consider the robustness of any Financial Viability Assessments submitted to the Council. Where there is any disagreement, the Council will engage an external party to analyse the viability assessment and provide an independent view.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The SPD will help to ensure that children and young people across the Borough grow up in, and thrive in, safe residential environments and communities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Although the priority of employment, learning and skills in Halton is not specifically referred to in the SPD, there is a close relationship between the economy and the housing market, with housing a driver of, but also responsive to, local economic growth and performance.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The priority for a healthier Halton is reflected within the SPD through supporting the development of well-designed residential communities that are sustainable and accessible to all.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The SPD will contribute to ensuring high standards of residential design for affordable units; this will include creating places that feel safe, secure and welcoming for everyone.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The SPD fully supports the creation of good quality residential environments that will assist in the urban regeneration of the Borough.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 No legal or financial risks to the Council have been identified.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The SPD addresses a number of equality and diversity issues particularly in meeting the housing needs of Halton's communities. The SPD also encourages developers to meet high access standards in the design of affordable housing provision such as those for wheelchair accessible housing.

9.0 REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

9.1 These are set out in Section 3, Supporting Information.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

10.1 The alternative to consulting on and adopting the SDP is to have no SPD. This is rejected as the adoption of the SPD will provide suitable information and guidance to developers regarding the application of policy CS13 avoiding potential confusion or conflict and streamlining and minimising officer time in calculating affordable housing contributions.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 The SPD will be subject to 6 weeks public consultation after which a further report will be prepared for Executive Board detailing the results of the consultation, any resultant changes and seeking approval to adopt.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Halton Core Strategy Local Plan (April 2013)	Planning & Transport Strategy, Municipal Building	Rachel Wright
Draft Affordable Housing SPD (May 2012)	Planning & Transport Strategy, Municipal Building	Rachel Wright
Mid-Mersey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (May 2011)	Planning & Transport Strategy, Municipal Building	Rachel Wright
Economic Viability Assessment (November 2010)	Planning & Transport Strategy, Municipal Building	Rachel Wright
The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012	Planning & Transport Strategy, Municipal Building	Rachel Wright